GETTING THE COMMAND AND CONTROL RIGHT: A VIETNAM CASE STUDY

A Monograph

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ABSTRACT

GETTING THE COMMAND AND CONTROL RIGHT: A VIETNAM CASE STUDY, by MAJ
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coherence. This monograph explores the degree to which problems in command and control
frustrated the synchronization of tactical actions.

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ACRONYMS

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CHECO	Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command
CINCPACAF	Commander-in-Chief Pacific Air Force
CINCPACFLT	Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
COMUSMACV	Commander, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam
CTF	Combined Task Force
CTZ	Corps Tactical Zone
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
FM	Field Manual
GVN	Government of Vietnam
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MACV	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
MAF	Marine Amphibious Force
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
NAVFORV	Naval Forces Vietnam
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OPLAN	Operation Plan
PACAF	Pacific Air Force
PACFLT	Pacific Fleet
PACOM	Pacific Command

RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missiles
TF	Task Force
USARPAC	United States Army Pacific
USASCV	United States Army Support Command Vietnam
VC	Viet Cong

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INTRODUCTION

> When something is everybody's business, it is nobody's business.
> General William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*[1]

This monograph is a study of the complicated problem of command and control in modern warfare. The challenges of command and control during the Vietnam War provide the basis for the exploration of an enduring matter of concern to military professionals.[2] The goal of achieving unity of command is inextricably linked to the creation of a clear and logical command structure.[3] Getting the command and control right is a precept on which military professionals pride themselves. A clear command structure ultimately enables military formations to synchronize actions towards a common aim or objective. The Army and Marine Corps espouse the principle of unity of command when maneuvering to close with and destroy the enemy. The Air Force believes in a single manager concept for the employment of air assets. A Navy captain is the sole commander of his/her ship on the high seas. In theory, all military operations should

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[1] William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 505.

[2] Current doctrine defines three levels of war: strategic level, operational level, and tactical level. The strategic level of war develops an idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multi-national objectives. The operational level of war links the tactical employment of forces to national and military strategic objectives. The tactical level of war focuses on the employment and ordered arrangement of forces in relation to each other. Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 11 August 2011), I12-I14.

[3] Unity of command is one of the nine principles of war. Unity of command means that a single commander directs and coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective. In the absence of command authority, commanders cooperate, negotiate, and build consensus to achieve unity of effort. The latest Army reference to the nine principles of war was in U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0 *Operations*, Change 1 (2011). Currently, unity of command is one of twelve principles of joint operations. U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0 *Operations*, Change 1 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 22 February 2011), A-1-A-4; Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 16 May 2012), 4-2; Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*, A-1.

exhibit unity of command. However, in warfare, rarely do theory and reality coincide. In modern

warfare, the reality is that unity of command is difficult to achieve. This is especially true at the

strategic and operational levels of war, where divergent interagency, intergovernmental, and

multi-national interests blur the establishment of clear command relationships. In many cases, no

command relationship exists.

Divergent interests within military organizations also degrade the creation of clear

command structures. This has warranted the continuous adjustment of existing command

structures to suit the needs of the situation at hand. In recent years, military professionals have

observed this tendency in Iraq and Afghanistan as the composition of headquarters, such as

Multi-National Forces-Iraq and International Security Assistance Force, morphed to suit the

needs of multiple organizations. When organizations adhere to their own interests, the reality is

that unity of command is more theory than reality. The result is a degraded capability to

synchronize military actions. One can observe this phenomenon by examining the Vietnam War

command structure and its impact on the application of air power. Friction between diverging

interests and unity of command will endure in the future just as it has in the past. Getting the

command and control right is easier said than done. Developing command structures that

encompass co-equal organizations, not bounded by hierarchy or common aim, will continue to

puzzle military planners.

The operational level responsibility for the Vietnam War is difficult to determine. Ian

Horwood in *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War* articulates the confusion

associated with who was actually in command in Vietnam. Horwood states "[t]echnically,

CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command] was the commander of all American forces

engaged in the war, but the name of Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp rarely is associated with the

Vietnam War whereas Army General William C. Westmoreland more frequently is."[4] This observation demonstrates the fragmented nature of command during the war. Who actually was in charge of the war was as questionable then as it is now. This confusion inevitably degraded the capability of military commanders to synchronize military actions.

The roles of the President, as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the Secretary of Defense, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and combatant commanders within the strategic level command structure of the U.S. military establishment has fostered a series of debates since the creation of the JCS in 1942. The nature of these debates primarily hinged upon the structure of the U.S. military establishment, civilian role in military matters, and the relationship between service components. Over two decades later, fallout from these enduring and unresolved debates manifested itself in the operational level command structure of the Vietnam War resulting in a multi-pronged approach to fighting the war and the unsynchronized employment of air power.

This monograph analyzes the U.S. military's transition from advisory to offensive operations during the Vietnam War, specifically focusing on command structures and their impact on the synchronization of tactical actions. Despite an already complex situation brought about through hybrid warfare, policy-makers and senior commanders compounded the complexity of the war by establishing inadequate command arrangements.[5] These command arrangements generated conflicting opinions regarding command relationships, the responsibility

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[4] Ian Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 64.

[5] A hybrid threat is the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, terrorist forces, and/or criminal elements unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects. During the Vietnam War, the presence of North Vietnamese Army regulars and Viet Cong insurgents constituted a hybrid threat. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, 1-3.

of physical areas, and the employment of air power.[6] The result was a piecemeal application of military power remiss of operational coherence. This monograph concludes that the U.S. military was unable to effectively synchronize tactical actions due to the establishment of an inadequate command and control structure.

There are a number of works and doctrinal manuals that provide insight into the aspects of command and control on the modern battlefield. For the U.S. Army in Vietnam, many of these works emphasized the importance of unity of effort during the conduct of joint and combined operations. Section VI: Command in Joint and Combined Operations of U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Field Service Regulations Operations* (1962) stated that "the requirement for unity of effort… directed towards a common objective is best achieved by the designation of a single commander… [who] must be provided authority and resources commensurate with his mission."[7] As a land force, seeking quick and favorable conflict resolution, the U.S. Army has traditionally placed great importance on its capability to create unity of effort by synchronizing military actions to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time. According to U.S. Army FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations Operations* (1962), this capability hinged upon unity of command, or the designation of a single commander entrusted with the authority to synchronize military actions.

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[6] Physical areas compose a component of the commander's operational environment. Included within physical areas are enemy, friendly, and neutral systems that are relevant to a specific operation. Pertinent physical areas include the operational area, area of influence, and area of interest. Operational areas include such descriptors as area of operations. U.S. Army doctrine defines an area of operations as an operational area defined by the joint force commander for land and maritime forces that should be large enough to accomplish their mission and protect their forces. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02 *Operational Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 28 November 2012), 1-3; Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*, IV1-IV2.

[7] U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5 *Field Service Regulations Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1962), 25.

Relatively few works focus specifically on the development of command structures vis-à-vis the Vietnam War. *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of U.S. Army Forces, 1942 – 1985* by Edgar F. Raines and David R. Campbell explored the debates that existed after the creation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Department of Defense, and other entities within the U.S. military establishment.[8] This book revealed an ongoing tension within the U.S. military establishment regarding civilian control of the military, the intersecting roles of senior civilian and military leaders during the creation of national strategy, and the realignment of command structures by successive presidential administrations.[9] Raines and Campbell assessed that the U.S. Army's recurrent aim was to ensure centralized command and control of the armed forces. *The History of the Unified Command Plan 1946 – 1993* complemented the Raines and Campbell by revealing organizational philosophies that have influenced command structure development since World War II.[10] A work that described the development of the operational command structure in Vietnam was *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control 1950 – 1969* by George S. Eckhardt.[11] This book focused on the

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[8] Edgar F. Raines and David R. Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of U.S. Army Forces, 1942 – 1985* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1986).

[9] For this study, members of the U.S. military establishment include the President, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff, service component departments, and theater or combatant commanders.

[10] Ronald H. Cole, Walter S. Poole, James F. Schnabel, Robert J. Watson, and Willard J. Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan* (Washington D.C.: Joint History Office, 1995).

[11] Major General George S. Eckhardt offered a U.S. Army perspective of command and control during the Vietnam War. In December 1966, Major General Eckhardt commanded the 9th Infantry Division and deployed the division to South Vietnam. He later assumed the role of Deputy Commanding General, II Field Force. In January 1968, Major General Eckhardt became the commander of Delta Military Assistance Command and Senior Advisor, IV Corps Tactical Zone. George S. Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control 1950 – 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974).

establishment of command arrangements in South Vietnam then proposed a series of adjustments that would have enhanced unity of command. As a former Army commander in Vietnam, Eckhardt revealed his affinity for centralized command and control by offering a recommendation to establish a unified theater commander capable of exercising control over all military forces in future wars.

The U.S. military's shift from advisory to offensive operations signified the waning utility of diplomacy to protect U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. Since the beginning of large-scale U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, the actions of the U.S. military in Vietnam have solicited further examination. According to some revisionist historians of the Vietnam War, misdirected military actions during the early years of the war prevented the attainment of national strategic objectives. This disconnect between tactical actions and strategic objectives contributed to the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. Today, some military professionals attribute failure in South Vietnam to the U.S. military's ineffective employment of operational art. This is especially true for those who espouse that it is the military's charter to link tactical actions with strategic objectives.

There is a considerable amount of literature on the Vietnam War. In the late 1960s and early 1970s works on Vietnam examined U.S. government policy. These works, written by journalists, memoirists, and historians, attempted to unveil a perceived discrepancy between the U.S. government's actions and intentions in Southeast Asia. In the late 1970s, after the fall of Saigon, a revisionist account of the war emerged. Revisionist accounts of the Vietnam War sought to defend U.S. intervention and refute previous works that characterized the war as unwinnable. Works from this period include *A Soldier Reports* by William C. Westmoreland and *Strategy for Defeat* by U.S. Grant Sharp.[12] The debate between early Vietnam War historians and

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[12] General William C. Westmoreland, Commander United States Military Assistance

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revisionist historians subsequently bolstered attempts to explain why the U.S. intervened and lost in Vietnam.

Another revisionist wave on the Vietnam War emerged during the late 1980s. Among the leaders of this new revisionist movement were military officers who served in the Vietnam War. Works during this period include *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* by Harry G. Summers and *The Army and Vietnam* by Andrew F. Krepenivich.[13] These military officers

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Command Vietnam from June 1964 to June 1968 and the most senior military officer on the ground in Southeast Asia, offered a first-hand account of the U.S. military's transition from advisory to offensive operations. The employment of limited means to achieve victory in Vietnam was in stark contrast to the realities facing military leaders on the ground. General Westmoreland argued that the attainment of victory required the corresponding employment of all necessary means. General Westmoreland highlighted distinct challenges that confronted senior military officers during the war such as the development of Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, the complicated command structure within Southeast Asia, and the politics of service parochialism within the military establishment. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*; As Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command from 30 June 1964 to 31 July 1968, Admiral U.S. Grand Sharp was responsible for all operations from the west coast of the United States to the Indian Ocean, which included Southeast Asia and Vietnam. Admiral Sharp complimented General Westmoreland's narrative for U.S. defeat by highlighting the devastating impact operational constraints placed upon the military by civilian leadership had on the conduct of warfare. This was especially true regarding the application of air power. According to Admiral Sharp, the civilian leadership, not the military, lost the war in Vietnam because they prevented the military from decisively using its tremendous air and sea power. U.S. Grant Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978).

[13] Summers added to revisionist history by examining the war from a Clausewitzian lens. Offering a different perspective, Summers provided two reasons for U.S. shortcomings in Southeast Asia. First, policy-makers failed to leverage the passion of the American people. Second, policy-makers adopted a strategy of graduated pressure in order to achieve limited objectives. Unlike the North Vietnamese, whose object was decisive victory, the U.S., with its inhibitions regarding full-scale combat operations in Vietnam, not only constrained its military but also emboldened the North Vietnamese by signaling a lack of seriousness about the war. Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1982); Krepenivich examined the U.S. Army's capability to adapt and learn by attributing policy failure in Vietnam to the U.S. Army's failure to adopt a strategy of pacification vice a strategy of attrition. Krepenivich argued that the U.S. Army should have deployed small unit tactics along the coastal plains to disrupt Viet Cong infiltration into populated areas. Instead, the U.S. Army, obstinately adhered to doctrine from previous wars and fought a war it had prepared to fight using maneuver and firepower. Andrew F. Krepenivich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

offered their own unique perspectives as to why the U.S. failed in Vietnam. In addition to critiquing U.S. policy, they examined the military's capability to link tactical actions to achieve strategic objectives. Late 1980s revisionists complemented late 1970s revisionists by arguing that the war was winnable. In a general sense, misdirected military actions were one of the causal mechanisms for failure in Vietnam.

Since the late 1980s, literature on the Vietnam War has taken different forms. Accounts by historians of the mid 1960s and mid 1970s and revisionists of the late 1970s and late 1980s have triggered the development of a diverse set of narratives. These works include *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* by H.R. McMaster, *Vietnam: The Necessary War* by Michael Lind, and *Our Vietnam: The War 1954 – 1975* by A.J. Langguth.[14] The body of knowledge that exists to help describe the strategic context of the Vietnam War is considerable. With good reason, these works focus on important topics such as civil-military relations, foreign policy objectives, and domestic turmoil.

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[14] McMaster attributed escalation in Vietnam to internal institutional flaws in decision-making rather than the external impetus to check Communist domination. McMaster described the dynamic nature of foreign policy-making. For military professionals, he illustrated some of the problems senior military leaders faced as they tailor military objectives to attain strategic objectives. H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, 1997); Lind argued that the Vietnam War was a proxy war between the U.S., Soviet Union, and China, not simply a war with North Vietnam. What was at stake was the existential threat of Communist domination and loss of global credibility during the Cold War. To Lind, decreased military constraint risked escalation into conventional or even nuclear war with China or the Soviet Union. From a Cold War perspective, the Vietnam War was unavoidable. Michael Lind, *Vietnam: The Necessary War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); Langguth provided a detailed analysis of the Vietnam War through the lens of various actors to include senior leaders in Saigon, Hanoi, and Paris. As such, Langguth provided a unique narrative that is offset from the U.S.-centered narrative of the Vietnam War. Langguth questioned the capability of U.S. policy-makers, despite their intellectual prowess, to understand the complexities associated with the situation in Southeast Asia. A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954 – 1975* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

Likewise, a large number of works also explore the arrangement and employment of military force during the Vietnam War.

A subset of these works focus on command structures and the use of air power. U.S. command structures at the strategic and operational levels during the Vietnam War did not promote unity of command. This degraded the U.S. military's capability to synchronize military actions. Several works demonstrate the link between command structures and their impact upon the use of air power. In addition to the memoirs of General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp, these works include *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam* by William W. Momyer, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968* by John Schlight, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War* by Ian Horwood, and *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962 – 1967* by Graham A. Cosmas.[15] Oral interviews, reports, and studies also provide first-hand insight on command relationships and their impact upon the employment of air power. These works include interviews by the U.S. Air Force Oral Interview Program, U.S. Navy Commander-in-Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) Reports, U.S. Air Force Project Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (CHECO) Reports, Center for Naval Analysis Reports, and U.S. Army Vietnam Studies.

This monograph builds upon the aforementioned works by examining the conduct of warfare in Southeast Asia at the operational level of war. This monograph explores whether the U.S. military was able to synchronize tactical actions in time, space, and purpose. It does so by examining strategic and operational level command structures within Vietnam and friction points

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[15] John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1988); William W. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2003); Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*; Graham A. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: United States Army Center of Military History, 2006).

associated with each. This monograph also looks at service component operational areas.[16] A rapid build-up of combat power in Southeast Asia increased the stakes for service components within Pacific Command (PACOM). Accordingly, PACOM delineated operational areas based upon service component affiliation. One example where the delineation of operational areas by service component detracted from the U.S. military's ability to synchronize was in North Vietnam where the Army, Air Force, and Navy played mutually exclusive roles in OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER. Before examining command structures and the employment of air assets during the Vietnam War, this monograph examines the relationship between operational art and synchronization.

<center>Operational Art and Synchronization</center>

Operational art is synchronization. The U.S. Army introduced operational art, in part, to insure in the future that it did not win all the battles only to lose the war.[17] This meant that commanders would have to logically link battles to serve a common strategic purpose. In order to understand this logic, it is useful to understand the contemporary usage of the terms operational art and synchronization.

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[16] When establishing the operational framework for military operations, commanders use control measures to assign responsibilities, coordinate fires and maneuver, and control combat operations. According to Army doctrine, one of the most important control measures is the area of operations. An enduring debate exists regarding whether air forces should be assigned areas of operation. Today, an area of operations is an operational area defined by the joint force commander for land and maritime forces that should be large enough to accomplish their mission and protect their forces. Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, 1-13.

[17] Winning all battles but losing the war is in reference to a 25 April 1975 conversation, which took place in Hanoi, between Colonel Harry G. Summers, Chief, Negotiations Division, U.S. Delegation and Colonel Tu, Chief, North Vietnamese Delegation. "You know you never defeated us on the battlefield," said Colonel Summers. "That maybe so," Colonel Tu replied, "but it is also irrelevant." Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, 1.

The etymological foundations of operational art trace back to Aleksandr A. Svechin and the Bolshevik Russia circa 1917.[18] More than half a century later and half a world away, the term operational art surfaced after the Vietnam War as the U.S. military developed the concept of Air Land Battle. The U.S. military institutionalized operational art by placing the term into capstone doctrinal manuals such as U.S. Army FM *100-5 Operations* (1986) and Joint Publication (JP) 3-0 *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (1993), the U.S. military's first joint doctrinal publication.[19]

Some argue that operational art is a relatively new addition to military doctrine and therefore has limited applicability, especially when used to examine military history. For others, operational art serves a valuable purpose because it exhibits characteristics of universality. Although the term operational art is relatively new to military doctrine, the concept of synchronization, which underscores the true essence of operational art, is as old as warfare itself. This argument hinges on the premise that the essence of operational art, rather than its strict definition, transcends time and space. An examination of various definitions and uses of the term operational art reveals the concept of synchronization deeply rooted in its meaning.[20]

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[18] Jacob W. Kipp, "The Tsarist and Soviet Operational Art, 1853-1991," in *The Evolution of Operational Art*, ed. John Adreas Olson and Martin van Creveld (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65.

[19] U.S. Army Field Manual 100-5 *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 5 May 1986); Joint Publication 3-0 *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 9 September 1993).

[20] Although etymology is important, there exists a danger in tracing the origins of operational art to specific individuals or to any single time-period. When coupled with a whiggish outlook on history, a tendency exists to accuse pre-operational art era commanders of not employing operational art during the planning and execution of their campaigns. This outlook not only presupposes that the conduct of warfare is progressive over time but also unfairly subjects pre-operational art era commanders to unwarranted criticism. The implication that military leaders were better in the twentieth century than in previous centuries undoubtedly detracts from the genius of Genghis Khan in Central Asia, Napoleon in Western Europe, or General Ulysses S. Grant at Vicksburg. Since operational art was not a doctrinal term in the U.S. military until the mid 1980s, this idea also presupposes that commanders did not execute operational art during the Vietnam War. Attempting to gauge operational art by examining a commander's ability to

Robert M. Epstein, in his book *Napoleon's Last Victory and the Emergence of Modern War*, argued the emergence of massive armies and the need to synchronize distributed maneuver during the Napoleonic Era served as the catalyst for operational art.[21] In *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art*, James J. Schneider contended that operational art emerged from the American Civil War due to advancements in military technology and the emergence of a capability to synchronize the actions of dispersed formations.[22] The ongoing debate regarding the birth of operational art challenges the notion that one can restrict operational art to a specific time or place. Both Epstein and Schneider argued that commanders practiced operational art well before Svechin coined the term in 1917. Distributed maneuver and dispersed formations certainly warranted a need for synchronization. Although Epstein and Schneider espouse dissimilar views regarding the emergence of operational art, both acknowledge the importance of synchronization in its practice.

Inextricably linking the definition of operational art to specific individuals or to a specific time-period has a tendency to detract from the very essence of its meaning. Summoning Socrates, Donald A. Shoen in *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* argued that written and verbal communication has its limitations in conveying true meaning.[23] Confining operational art to a strict definition promotes the loss of meaning.[24] The concept of synchronization resonates in all

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synchronize refutes this notion.

[21] Robert M. Epstein, *Napoleon's Last Victory and the Emergence of Modern Warfare* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 5.

[22] James J. Schneider, *Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of the Operational Art,* Theoretical Paper No. 4 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2004), 27.

[23] Donald A. Shoen, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 80-99.

[24] This may explain why the U.S. military has multiple definitions for operational art.

definitions of operational art. JP 3-0 *Joint Operations* defines operational art as "the use of creative thinking by commanders and staffs to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces."[25] Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) *3-0 Unified Land Operations*, one of the US Army's two capstone doctrine publications, defines operational art as the "pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical action in time, space, and purpose."[26] Shimon Naveh, in *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory,* complimented both definitions by leveraging Russian military theory and systems theory to characterize operational art.[27] Aspects such as synergy, non-linearity, and cognitive tension all emphasize the importance of synchronization at the operational level of war.[28] Synchronization is not a new concept in warfare. Although the term operational art is relatively new to military doctrine, the need to synchronize is as old as warfare itself.

ADP 3-0 *Unified Land Operations* defines synchronization as "the arrangement of military actions in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at a decisive place and time."[29] Similar to Naveh's concept of operational level cohesion, synchronization hinges on a military force's capability to achieve non-linear effects through the

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Hew Strachan, while referring to the term strategy, compliments Shoen's argument by contending that the context in which one uses a term matters. It is only when one engages in the continuous dialogue can one begin to understand true meaning. Hew Strachan, "The Lost Meaning of Strategy," *Survival*, v.47 (Autumn 2005): 40-43.

[25] Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*, II-3.

[26] Army Doctrine Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 10 October 2011), 9.

[27] Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (New York: Frank Cass, 2004).

[28] Ibid., 12-13.

[29] Army Doctrine Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, 9.

"ability to execute multiple, related, and mutually exclusive supporting tasks in different locations at the same time."[30] Naveh argued that the litmus test for a military organization's operational ability depended on whether it could successfully produce results that were "significantly greater than the linear arithmetic sum of its components' accomplishments."[31] Another litmus test Naveh provided was cognitive tension.[32] During the Vietnam War, a lack of cognitive tension between commanders revealed the absence of unity of command. Unity of command facilitates unity of effort and the development of a common aim. The creation of a common aim promotes cognitive tension. Consequently, this common aim serves to synchronize what would have otherwise been disparate organizations. Applying Naveh's theory to assess the U.S. military's ability to generate non-linear results risks engaging in an impossible task. One can better examine operational ability by assessing the level of cognitive tension that existed among subordinate units. This study links the absence of cognitive tension between subordinate commanders to an inability to synchronize military forces towards a common aim.

As a generalization, all military professionals agree that unity of command is a good thing. However, seldom do all military professionals agree on which level or within which organization unity of command should reside. History reveals a classic debate regarding the optimal delegation of power to obtain optimal results. Helmuth von Moltke's quest to determine the *goldene mittelstrasse* was a debate centered on the optimal distribution of artillery power to achieve decisive victory.[33] Raines and Campbell exposed an analogous and enduring debate after

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[30] Army Doctrine Publication 3-0 *Unified Land Operations*, 9.

[31] Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory*, 13.

[32] Tension denotes a positive force that binds two or more entities. Ibid.

[33] Helmuth von Moltke and his Prussian Army sought the *goldene mittelstrasse* or golden mean, which was the optimal balance between direct and general support of infantry. Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870 – 1871* (New York:

World War II as civilian and military leaders sought to create the optimal structure within the U.S. military establishment to suit the demands of future wars.[34] During the Defense Reform debates of the 1980s, which resulted in the Goldwater-Nichols Act, policy-makers and senior military leaders sought the optimal balance between strategic monism and strategic pluralism to fix perceived defense problems and avoid any recurrences of operations similar to OPERATION DESERT ONE.[35]

As demonstrated by numerous cases in history, the debate regarding the delegation of power to achieve optimal results is never-ending. One person's perception of the *goldene mittelstrasse* may differ significantly from another's. During the conduct of warfare, this difference in opinion degrades cognitive tension and unity of command. As such, potential exists for the creation of disparate organizations striving to facilitate their own imperatives at the expense of the larger organization. During the early 1960s, the Kennedy Administration lost faith in the capabilities of the JCS after the Bay of Pigs.[36] The delegation of authority within the U.S.

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Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

[34] Raines and Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of U.S. Army Forces, 1942 – 1985*.

[35] OPERATION DESERT ONE was an aborted rescue attempt of U.S. hostages held in Iran. This failed operation, which occurred in 1980, degraded the U.S. military's influence over its civilian leaders and the U.S. population. Institutionalization of joint operations within the U.S. military did not occur until the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986. Due to a lack of focus on joint operations, the U.S. military also experienced problems synchronizing tactical actions during OPERATION URGENT FURY in Granada and while conducting military intervention in Lebanon. Military actions in Granada and Lebanon occurred in 1983. For more information on OPERATION DESERT ONE see Charles G. Cogan, "Desert One and Its Disorders," *Journal of Military History*, v.67, n.1 (January 2003), 201-16 and Lucien S. Vandenbrouke, *Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136-151.

[36] The Bay of Pigs Invasion was a U.S.-sponsored military operation intended to replace the Castro regime. Failure of this operation led President Kennedy to question the military advice of his most senior military advisors. Influenced the Bay of Pigs Invasion and General (Retired) Maxwell D. Talyor's book *The Uncertain Trumpet*, which provided a critique of the failures of

military establishment shifted from military to civilian leaders. Accordingly, the propensity for

the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Navy to focus on their own imperatives followed suit.

This propensity manifested itself within the strategic and operational level command structures of

the Vietnam War. Operational commanders had to answer to multiple civilian and military

bosses. Operational commanders also ceded their authority to conduct military operations to

civilian and military members of the U.S. military establishment who were higher in the chain of

command. From the context of the Cold War and possible escalation with China or the Soviet

Union, this command structure offered greater control over military capability. Policy-makers

could precisely tailor military action to suit policy objectives. This command structure also served

to bridle the audacity of operational level commanders who could have otherwise escalated the

war beyond acceptable levels. From the perspective of commanders at the operational level, this

command structure decreased unity of command and degraded their capability to synchronize

military forces towards a common aim.

COMMAND AND CONTROL IN THE VIETNAM WAR

After the defeat of the Japanese Empire in 1945, the Provisional Government of the

French Republic attempted to restore colonial rule in what was formerly French Indochina.

Nationalist and Communist movements in Vietnam gave rise to the First Indochina War between

Viet Minh guerrillas and French colonial forces. 13 March 1954 marked a significant turn of

events after Viet Minh guerrillas seized the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, hastening the end

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the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Eisenhower Administration, President Kennedy created a new
position within the U.S. military establishment called the Office of the Military Representative of
the President. General (Retired) Taylor assumed the role of Military Representative to President
Kennedy. The creation of this civilian position revealed the waning military influence on matters
of foreign policy during the early stages of the Vietnam War. Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain
Trumpet* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960); Raines and Campbell, *The Army and the Joint
Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of U.S.
Army Forces, 1942 – 1985*, 106-108.

of French colonial aspirations in Indochina.[37] The Geneva Conference, held from 26 April to 20

July 1954, resulted in the Geneva Accords, which divided Indochina into Cambodia, Laos, North

Vietnam and South Vietnam.[38] North and South Vietnam were to hold a nation-wide election in

1956, but Ngo Dinh Diem, the leader of South Vietnam, ultimately called off the election with

U.S. backing sparking a new phase of conflict.

The struggle for unification between the Chinese and Soviet-supported Viet Minh and the

U.S.-supported government in South Vietnam ultimately resulted in the emergence of the

Vietnam War, or Second Indochina War. From 20 July 1954 to the escalation of hostilities in the

Gulf of Tonkin a decade later, U.S. involvement in South Vietnam consisted of bolstering the

fledgling government in South Vietnam by providing financial, material, and military support.[39]

The Truman Administration initially established Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to

aid the French in their efforts against the Viet Minh.[40] As the French withdrew from Southeast

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[37] Dien Bien Phu was a remote airfield near the North Vietnam and Laos border, approximately 160 miles west of Hanoi. Approximately 40,000 Viet Minh guerrillas, supported by heavy artillery, fought against 20,000 French soldiers in an engagement that started on 13 March 1954. The Viet Minh enveloped and overwhelmed the French forces at Dien Bien Phu on 7 May 1954.

[38] The United States, Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain called for the Geneva Conference with the purpose of seeking a solution to the Korean War and settling the conflict in Indochina.

[39] Admiral Sharp provided an overview of events leading up to U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia in his memoir, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*. For more information on this transitional period see *Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941-1960* by Ronald H. Spector and *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* by Fredrik Logevall. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 5-49; Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941-1960* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1983); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012).

[40] For more information regarding U.S. advisory efforts in Vietnam see *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army* by James L. Collins. James L. Collins, *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1991).

Asia, the United States continued its support of the South Vietnamese. During the Eisenhower Administration, MAAG consisted of a few hundred military advisors. President Kennedy increased MAAG's size to approximately 18,000 but avoided committing combat troops. In February 1962, the Kennedy Administration established Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). While MAAG focused its efforts on training the South Vietnamese military, MACV assumed the mission of supporting the South Vietnamese in their efforts to defeat communism and destroy the Viet Cong (VC). The intent of this new command was two-fold. First, the establishment of MACV demonstrated to the world that the United States was committed to South Vietnam. Second, this new command would absorb and control major combat units if the situation in Vietnam escalated.[41] The existence of MAAG and MACV resulted in a duplication of effort and the inefficient use of resources.[42] Finally, on 15 May 1964, MACV absorbed MAAG.

Instability of the South Vietnamese government under President Ngo Dinh Diem coupled with a growing number of Communist guerrilla attacks sparked concerns over South Vietnam's ability to resist Communist aggression. In light of this, the Johnson Administration escalated the war after hostilities erupted in the Gulf of Tonkin. In 1965, the Johnson Administration committed U.S. ground forces to South Vietnam. While the responsibility for South Vietnam rested on the shoulders of Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV) and the Ambassador to South Vietnam, CINCPAC was responsible for the entire Southeast Asia region, to include North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. This arrangement led to a three-pronged approach to fighting the war that consisted of supporting the ground war in South Vietnam, bombing North Vietnam to discourage support for the VC, and deterring the

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[41] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967,* 21-29.

[42] Collins, *Vietnam Studies: The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army*, 32; Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control 1950 – 1969*, 30-38.

Chinese from entering the conflict.[43] For subordinate units from various services, overlapping spheres of influence obscured who was in charge at any given time and served as a cognitive impediment for the timely and efficient shifting of resources within Southeast Asia.

Strategic Level Command Structure

The strategic level command structure for the Vietnam War ran from the President to CINCPAC. Responding to President Kennedy's directives, the Secretary of Defense called for the creation of a unified command for Vietnam that would report to the Secretary of Defense through the JCS.[44] Under this arrangement, MACV would exist as a separate unified command, not under operational control of PACOM. However, based on the possibility of large-scale conflict with China, the JCS and CINCPAC objected to this arrangement.[45] According to the JCS and CINCPAC, the potential for a larger conflict in Southeast Asia warranted the creation of a command structure capable of dealing with full-scale conventional war.

The command structure for decision-making during the Vietnam War started with the President, who served as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and the National Security Council, which, in addition to the President Johnson, consisted of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and the Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.[46] Operating under the Secretary of State was Maxwell D. Taylor, Ambassador to South Vietnam, who exercised control over all U.S. policy in South Vietnam. In a letter from

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[43] Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 75.

[44] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 22; Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan*, 36.

[45] Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, 36; Schlight, 85-86.

[46] Hubert Humphrey assumed the Vice Presidency on 20 January 1965. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 38.

President Johnson to Ambassador Taylor regarding the assumption of his new post as

ambassador, President Johnson made it clear that Ambassador Taylor would exercise overall

responsibility for U.S. efforts in Vietnam. This responsibility included the entire military effort in

South Vietnam and the authority to dictate command and control relationships that Ambassador

Taylor considered appropriate.[47] Ambassador Taylor's broad authority created a condition for

commanders such as General Westmoreland to answer to multiple bosses.[48]

Under the Secretary of Defense was the JCS. By mid-1964, the JCS consisted of General

Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Harold K. Johnson,

Army Chief of Staff, General Curtis E. LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, and Admiral David L.

McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations.[49] General Wallace M. Greene, Commandant of the

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[47] According to Admiral Sharp, Ambassador Taylor received a letter from President Johnson on 5 July 1964 that provided Ambassador Taylor with broad authority in South Vietnam. This included the entire military effort in South Vietnam and the authority to dictate command and control relationships that Ambassador Taylor considered appropriate. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 36-37.

[48] By July 1964, approximately one month after General Westmoreland took command of Military Assistance Command Vietnam from General Paul D. Harkins, the ambiguity associated with civilian-military relationships subsided to some degree. At the very least, General (Retired) Taylor, newly appointed as Ambassador to South Vietnam, and General Westmoreland established a clear relationship with one another. According to General Westmoreland, "there was never a question as to my relationship with Ambassador Taylor. He was the boss; I was, in effect, his deputy for military affairs." Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 81.

[49] General John P. McConnell replaced General Curtis Lemay as Air Force Chief of Staff on 1 February 1965. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 207.
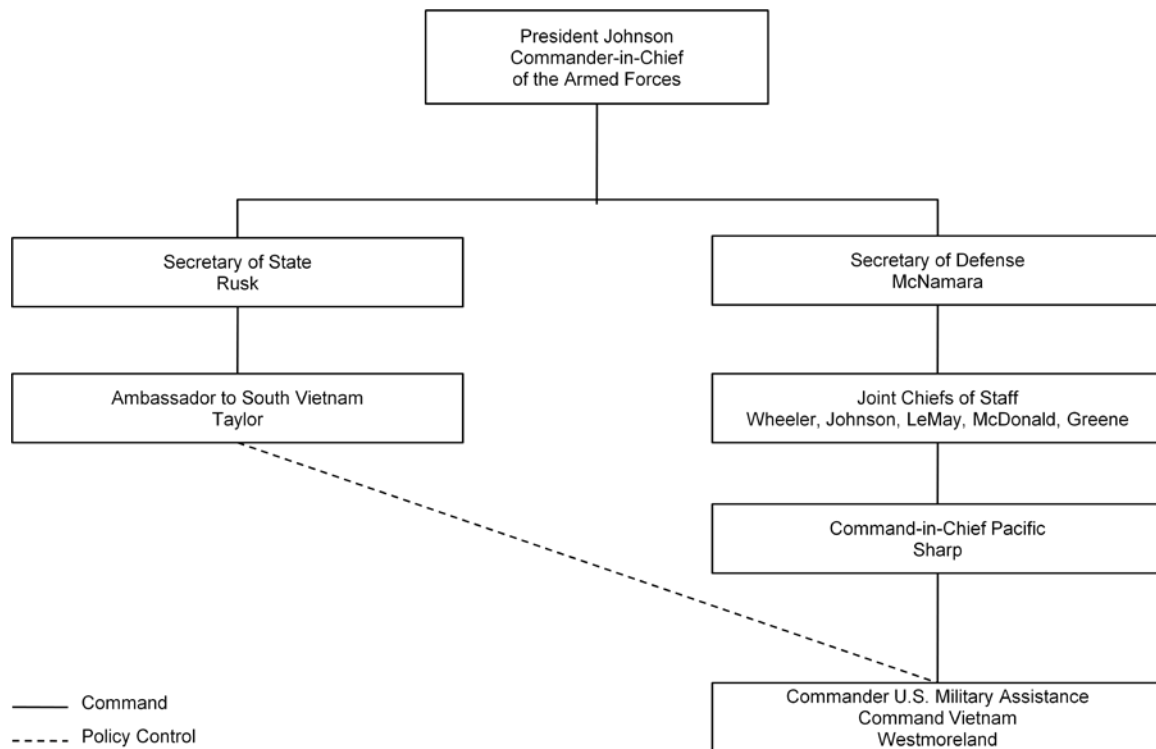
Figure 1. Command Structure for Strategic Decision-Making in Vietnam

Source: Adapted from Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp's depiction of the command structure for politico-military decision-making vis-à-vis Vietnam. U.S. Grant Sharp, *A Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 35-38.

Marine Corps, represented the Marine Corps as a member of the JCS when required.[50] In line

with the existing command structure of the U.S. military establishment, the JCS retained a

"channel of command" over all unified and specified commands including PACOM.[51] Based on

objections by the JCS and CINCPAC, MACV did not become a specified command but remained

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[50] Regular members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Chief of Staff, Air Force Chief of Staff, and Chief of Naval Operations. The Commandant of the Marine Corps participated when matters pertaining to the Marine Corps were under consideration. Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 36.

[51] Raines and Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of U.S. Army Forces, 1942 – 1985*, 98-112.

under the command of PACOM. This arrangement, coupled with Ambassador Taylor's broad

authority, created a unique set of circumstances at the operational level for CINCPAC and

COMUSMACV by introducing multiple command authorities capable of directing action in

South Vietnam. More importantly, the adopted command structure elevated the level at which

unity of command resided. In reality, unity of command resided with the President who exercised

control over both the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. The result was degraded unity

of command for operational level commanders. Not surprisingly, this command structure

promoted the piecemeal employment of Air Force and Navy air assets.

<center>Operational Level Command Structure</center>

The operational level command structure for PACOM included three service component

headquarters and MACV.[52] Admiral Sharp's component commanders during the U.S. military's

transition to offensive operations in Southeast Asia were General John K. Waters, commander of

U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC), General Hunter Harris Jr., Commander-in-Chief Pacific Air

Force (CINCPACAF), and Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet

(CINCPACFLT).[53] General Westmoreland directed air operations into South Vietnam through

the 2d Air Division, later the Seventh Air Force.[54] The commander of the Seventh Air Force

reported to both COMUSMACV and CINCPACAF.

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[52] Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan*, 36.

[53] Admiral Roy L. Johnson replaced Admiral Thomas H. Moorer as Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet on 30 March 1965.

[54] Initially, the 2d Air Division was a subordinate organization under the Thirteenth Air Force. 2d Air Division was redesignated as the Seventh Air Force on 14 March 1966. 2d Air Division was based out of Tan Son Nhut airfield on the outskirts of Saigon. The Thirteenth Air Force was located in the Philippines. Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, 36; Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 71.

In theory, CINCPAC was to direct air operations into North Vietnam through Pacific Air

Force (PACAF) and Pacific Fleet (PACFLT).[55] Admiral Sharp further designated CINCPACAF

as the air coordination authority for all service components with a tacit understanding that this

authority would ultimately reside with the 2d Air Division, later Seventh Air Force, due to its

location in South Vietnam.[56] A naval liaison element, collocated with the Seventh Air Force,

coordinated operations into Laos and North Vietnam.[57] According to Admiral Sharp, this

arrangement enabled Seventh Air Force to synchronize the efforts of multiple units to avoid

"mutual interference."[58]

MACV had representation from all service components. USARPAC oversaw supply and

combat service support for MACV through U.S. Army Support Command Vietnam.[59] The

Seventh Air Force served as the Air Force component to MACV. The Seventh Air Force and

Task Force 77, an aircraft carrier strike force assigned to the Seventh Fleet operating from

Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin, conducted air strikes into North Vietnam.

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[55] Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan*, 36.

[56] Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 30 June 1968, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Douglas Pike Collection, Box 13, Folder 17, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item =2130317013 (accessed 10 March 2013).

[57] Task Force 77 Coordinating Group was the navy liaison element that was collocated with Seventh Air Force in Saigon.

[58] Admiral Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 30 June 1968.

[59] Until 20 July 1965, the commander of U.S. Army Support Command Vietnam served as Military Assistance Command Vietnam's Army component commander. U.S. Pacific Command redesignated U.S. Army Support Command Vietnam as United States Army Vietnam with General William C. Westmoreland as its commander. General Westmoreland served a dual-hatted role as both the Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam and the Army component commander in Vietnam. Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, 36; Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 314-320.
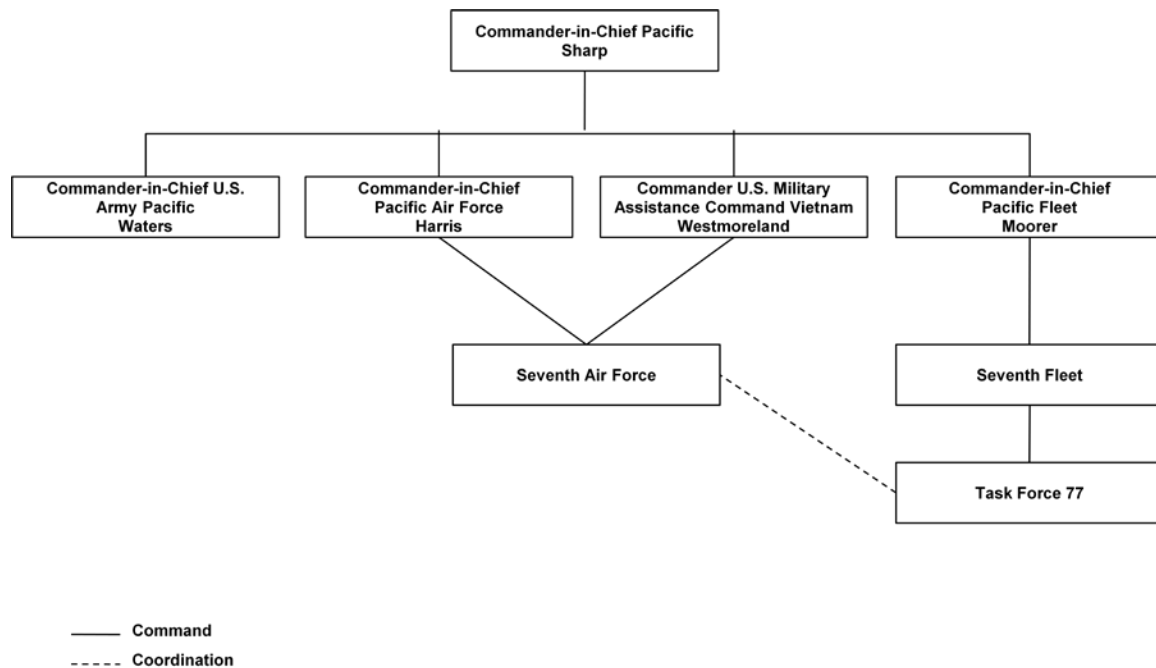
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                    ┌─────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Commander-in-Chief Pacific  │
                    │            Sharp            │
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| Commander-in-Chief U.S. Army Pacific Waters | Commander-in-Chief Pacific Air Force Harris | Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam Westmoreland | Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet Moorer |

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                              Seventh Air Force ........... Task Force 77

                                                           Seventh Fleet
                                                                │
                                                           Task Force 77
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──── Command
- - - - Coordination

Figure 2. Pacific Command Structure for Air Operations

Source: Adapted from Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp's depiction of the command structure for control of military operations in Vietnam. U.S. Grant Sharp, *A Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 78.

In addition to U.S. Army and other allied land warfare units such as Republic of Korea Forces Vietnam, MACV had operational control of the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). III MAF did not have an official command relationship with Naval Forces Vietnam (NAVFORV) but operated under the administrative control of Fleet Marine Force Pacific, which was then under the command of Lieutenant General Victor H. Krulak.[60]

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[60] Fleet Marine Force Pacific Command was under the operational command of Pacific Fleet. General Lewis W. Walt's memoir provides some insight to a commander who served two bosses. As the Commander, III Marine Amphibious Force, General Walt answered to both Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam and Commander Fleet Marine Force Pacific. Lewis W. Walt, *Strange War, Strange Strategy: A General's Report on Vietnam* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970).

Naval assets from the PACFLT provided MACV with added capability to deal with

threat from the sea to include the littorals of South Vietnam and the Mekong Delta.[61] PACFLT

also provided naval gunfire support.[62] In 1966, NAVFORV, consisting of Combined Task Forces

(CTF) 115 and 116, conducted OPERATION MARKET TIME and OPERATION GAME

WARDEN.[63] OPERATION MARKET TIME, conducted by CTF 115, was a combined U.S.

Navy and Vietnamese operation that sought to deny the infiltration of lethal accelerants into

South Vietnam by sea. OPERATION GAME WARDEN, conducted by CTF 116, aimed to deny

enemy movement and resupply along the major rivers in the Mekong Delta.[64] The U.S. Navy also

provided MACV with the capability to employ a joint Army-Navy Mobile Riverine Force.[65]

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[61] The U.S. Coast Guard also played a role in patrolling the South Vietnamese coastline. On 12 June 1965, U.S. Coast Guard Squadron One, consisting of seventeen 82-foot patrol boats, came under the operational command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Eugene N. Tulich, *The United States Coast Guard in South East Asia During the Vietnam Conflict*, U.S. Coast Guard Historical Monograph Program, 1 January 1975, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Charles Barrow Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items. php?item=0170103014 (accessed 23 March 2013).

[62] Pacific Fleet initiated naval gunfire in support of land operations on 15 May 1965.

[63] OPERATION MARKET TIME was established in March 1965. This operation forced the North Vietnamese to rely on land lines of communication such as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. OPERATION GAME WARDEN was established on 18 December 1965. The rapid build-up of U.S. Navy forces in 1965 warranted the establishment of Naval Forces Vietnam on 1 April 1966. Military Assistance Command Vietnam had operational control over Naval Forces Vietnam.

[64] Control of rivers was essential to pacification in South Vietnam. Victor Daniels and Judith C. Erdheim, *CRC 284 Game Warden*, Center for Naval Analysis, Operations Evaluation Group, 1 January 1976, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Glenn Helm Collection, Box 6, Folder 8, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item= 1070608001 (accessed 23 March 2013).

[65] The Mobile Riverine Force, also known as Task Force 117, was established in early 1967. Its task was to interdict Viet Cong infiltrating along waterways of the Mekong Delta region. The Mobile Riverine Force consisted of a U.S. Army infantry brigade and U.S. Navy gunboats and brown-water vessels. Pacific Fleet rejected Military Assistance Command Vietnam's request to place Task Force 117 under the command of a single headquarters. Rather, U.S. Army and U.S. Navy commanders within Task Force 117 conducted their missions based on a mutual support relationship. This relationship was reminiscent of the relationship between

Although COMUSMACV commanded all U.S. forces and operations within South Vietnam and some naval operations within thirty to forty miles of the coast, CINCPACFLT commanded all naval air and naval gunfire assets that supported operations in South Vietnam.[66]

<u>Relationship Between CINCPAC and COMUSMACV</u>

The JCS designated MACV a sub-unified command under PACOM. This arrangement restricted direct communication between COMUSMACV and the JCS or Secretary of Defense.[67] However, in practice, the JCS often times communicated directly with General Westmoreland while providing courtesy copies to Admiral Sharp.[68] The need to send duplicate reports to assuage the requests of two different bosses further exposed the dysfunctional command relationship between PACOM and MACV.

According to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV would "have direct responsibility for all U.S. military policy, operations and assistance in that country, and the authority to discuss both the U.S. and Vietnamese military operations directly with the President of Vietnam and the leaders of

General Ulysses S. Grant and Admiral David G. Farragut during the American Civil War. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 312-313; William B. Fulton, *Vietnam Studies: Riverine Operations 1966 – 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1972), Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Paul Kasper Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/ items.php?item=5620104001 (accessed 25 March 2013).

[66] Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan*, 36.

[67] Message from Admiral Harry D. Felt, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command to Lieutenant General Lionel C. McGarr, Establishment of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 8 February 1962, U.S. State Department, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961 – 1963, Volume II, Vietnam, 1962, Document 53, http://history.state.gov/historical documents/frus1961-63v02/d53 (accessed 5 February 2013).

[68] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 90-91.

the GVN."[69] Since MACV's inception, senior military leaders such as General Maxwell D.

Taylor, who was then the CJCS, and policy-makers such as Averall W. Harriman, Assistant

Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs engaged in dialogue regarding the command and control

arrangements within Southeast Asia. In a 2 April 1963 memorandum for record regarding

command relationships, General Taylor expressed his belief that establishing a direct channel of

communication between the JCS and MACV would be challenging due to "practical

difficulties."[70] General Taylor and the JCS along with General Paul D. Harkins, COMUSMACV

at the time, were content with an agreement that gave COMUSMACV the authority to deal with

local incidents and to conduct the campaign as he saw fit without further specific authority from

higher headquarters.[71]

In addition to a potential for high civilian involvement in military matters, this dialogue

served as a harbinger for other difficulties to follow. During the transition from advisory to

offensive operations, the relationship between PACOM and MACV generated questions as to

who was in charge of prosecuting the war in South Vietnam.[72] According to CINCPAC,

COMUSMACV was to "[e]xercise operational control of all U.S. forces and military agencies

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[69] Message from Admiral Felt, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command to Lieutenant General McGarr, Establishment of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 8 February 1962.

[70] Maxwell D. Taylor, Memorandum for Record by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Subject: Meeting with Under Secretary Harriman with Regard to Command Relationships between Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command and Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 2 April 1963, U.S. State Department, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961 – 1963, Volume III, Vietnam, January-August 1963, Document 75, http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v03/d75 (accessed 5 February 2013).

[71] Ibid.

[72] Message from Admiral Felt, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command to Lieutenant General McGarr, Establishment of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 8 February 1962.

assigned or attached."[73] However, one caveat to this arrangement was MACV's restricted span of authority within Southeast Asia. Although COMUSMACV had operational control of all assigned forces, he could only "conduct military operations as directed by CINCPAC."[74]

Admiral Sharp was sensitive to Washington's concerns about escalation to full-scale war. Consistent with this sensitivity and in concert with his final military objective of posturing for a potentially larger conflict with China, Admiral Sharp opposed changes to the standing operational level command arrangement in Southeast Asia. According to General William W. Momyer, commander of Seventh Air Force, Admiral Sharp believed that PACAF and PACFLT should fight the air war in North Vietnam and Laos while MACV fought the war in South Vietnam.[75] Admiral Sharp also believed that PACAF and PACFLT should support operations within South Vietnam from outside the country.[76] This command arrangement offered two advantages. From a strategic standpoint, it provided CINCPAC with the flexibility to posture for a larger conflict should China commit to large-scale retaliation beyond Southeast Asia. Arraying forces across Southeast Asia and the Pacific region would enable Admiral Sharp to react favorably to an expanding conflict. This arrangement would also provide better options to support the mass movement of troops and supplies into other regions of the Pacific. From an operational standpoint, this arrangement provided CINCPAC with the capability to orchestrate the air war.

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[73] Message from Admiral Felt, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command to Lieutenant General McGarr, Establishment of Military Assistance Command Vietnam, 8 February 1962.

[74] Ibid.

[75] General William W. Momyer assumed command of Seventh Air Force from Major General Joseph H. Moore in July 1966. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam*, 88.

[76] Ibid.

Fortunately, larger-scale Chinese intervention did not come to fruition. Unfortunately, the established command structure degraded the synchronization of Air Force and Navy air assets.

As the commander on the ground, General Westmoreland's views regarding the command structure for the Vietnam War differed significantly from Admiral Sharp's. General Westmoreland believed that the creation of a unified command for the entire Southeast Asia region would have mitigated the confusion associated with diverging theories on the prosecution of the war.[77] Reflecting on the Vietnam command structure, General Westmoreland wrote "[a] unified commander provided with broader policy guidance and a political advisor would have obviated the bureaucratic wrangles that raged in Washington [that] resulted in military decisions strongly influenced by civilian officials who, however well-intentioned, lacked military expertise either from experience or study."[78] Espousing the concept of unity of effort, as expressed in doctrinal manuals of his time, General Westmoreland believed that "[i]nstead of five commanders…there would have been one man directly answerable to the President on everything…[s]uch an arrangement would have eliminated the problem of co-ordination between air and ground wars that was inevitable with CINCPAC managing one, MACV the other."[79]

Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland enjoyed a positive personal relationship. General Westmorland respected Admiral Sharp for his ability to reject parochialism and treat all services fairly.[80] Likewise, Admiral Sharp respected General Westmoreland for his strategic and

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[77] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 499-500.

[78] Ibid.

[79] The five commanders General Westmoreland referred to were the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and the American Ambassadors to Thailand, Laos, and South Vietnam. Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 91.

tactical prowess.[81] Although General Westmoreland sensed jealousy from Admiral Sharp's staff

due to President Johnson's emphasis on MACV's mission in South Vietnam, General

Westmoreland made an effort to thoroughly consider Admiral Sharp's views regarding the war.[82]

However, offset from this favorable personal relationship, the question of who should be in

charge of the war generated ambiguity regarding the purpose of tactical actions.[83] The

implications of this command arrangement would later surface with the expanded use of air assets

in Southeast Asia.

Physical Areas and Geography

Despite the superior maneuverability and firepower of U.S. and allied forces, North

Vietnamese Army (NVA) and VC formations were often able to exploit weather and terrain to

their advantage. During the U.S. military's transition to offensive operations, CINCPAC's area of

influence included Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and South and North Vietnam.[84] This area also

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[81] Sharp, *A Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, xv.

[82] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 91.

[83] The professional relationship between General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp was reminiscent of the relationship between General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz during World War II. Both Army commanders were at the mercy of the Navy to fill requests for support that were, from the Army's perspective, essential to mission accomplishment. However, unlike General MacArthur, General Westmoreland was not a theater commander. Where General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz were in many regards co-equal, General Westmoreland was subordinate to Admiral Sharp. Whether the Johnson administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff created this arrangement out of design in order to preempt the emergence of another Yalu River scenario along the border of North and South Vietnam warrants further examination.

[84] An area of influence is a geographical area wherein a commander is directly capable of influencing operations by maneuver or fire support systems normally under the commander's command or control. An area of interest is an area of concern to the commander, including the area of influence, areas thereto, and extending into enemy territory. The area of interest also includes areas occupied by enemy forces that could jeopardize the accomplishment of the mission. Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*, IV1-IV2; Army Doctrine Reference Publication 1-02 *Operational Terms and Military Symbols*, 1-2.

included the South China Sea, and surrounding littorals. Physical areas played a significant role in the conduct of the Vietnam War.

CINCPAC's means of influencing these areas were through land and sea-based air power. Aside from political constraints, PACOM's capability to strike targets anywhere within Southeast Asia placed NVA and VC formations at risk anywhere on the battlefield. Air power provided CINCPAC the capability to cover his entire area of interest with fires. However, strategic and operational level command structures during the Vietnam War hampered the creation of physical areas that could facilitate the efficient employment of air assets into areas exploited by the NVA and VC. This posed a significant problem for COMUSMACV whose span of influence did not expand into territories that threatened his mission.[85]

South Vietnam is approximately 700 miles long, 50 to 150 miles wide, and shares borders with North Vietnam to its north and Laos and Cambodia to its west. Five geographic areas divide South Vietnam: highlands, plateau, coastal lowlands, foothills, and delta. The highlands, an offshoot of the Annamite Mountain Range, consist of dense jungle and rugged mountains, which severely restricts wheeled mobility. Vegetation in this area facilitated infiltration into South Vietnam. Rolling plateaus break up the rugged terrain. Together, the highland and plateau areas create the Central Highlands region.

East of the Central Highlands is the coastal lowland area. The coastal lowland area is a narrow strip of fertile land that runs along the eastern edge of South Vietnam. Much of the population, agriculture, and commerce are in the coastal lowland area. The coastal lowland area encompassed port cities such as Da Nang and Qui Nhon. Security in these areas was critical to the

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[85] This problem is often referred to as the sanctuary problem. For more information on this topic see *Out of Bounds: Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare* by Thomas A. Bruscino. Thomas A. Bruscino, *Out of Bounds: Transnational Sanctuary in Irregular Warfare* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006).

build-up and projection of U.S. and allied combat power. East-west spurs extending from the highlands area into the South China Sea intermittently divide the coastal lowland area.

Bordering the Central Highlands to the south is the foothill area. South Vietnam shares the foothill area with Cambodia. The foothill area offers both concealed and high-speed access into South Vietnam. The terrain in this area, an offshoot of the Annamite Mountain Range, consists of rolling hills and large plains that gradually transition into the coastal lowlands near Saigon. During the Vietnam War, the foothill area bordered large NVA and VC sanctuaries in Cambodia. This area was well suited for tracked vehicle movement and was the location of many conventional force-on-force engagements. To the south is the Mekong River Delta. The Mekong River Delta consists of a maze of rice paddies, canals, rivers, and swamps. This area is no more than 10 feet above sea level. Responsibility for this area fell under IV Corps, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The U.S. Army and Navy, combined with the Vietnamese Navy, conducted extensive operations in this area to interdict VC activity.

Laos is landlocked country that shares a large border with South and North Vietnam to its east and Thailand to its west. The Mekong River, which originates from the Tibetan Plateau in Central Asia, generally serves as a natural border between Laos and Thailand. The Mekong River provides an excellent line of communication from Laos, through Cambodia, to South Vietnam. The Annamite Mountain Range, which originates in southwest China and extends south, serves as a border between Vietnam and Laos. This spine of jungle-covered mountains terminates at Ho
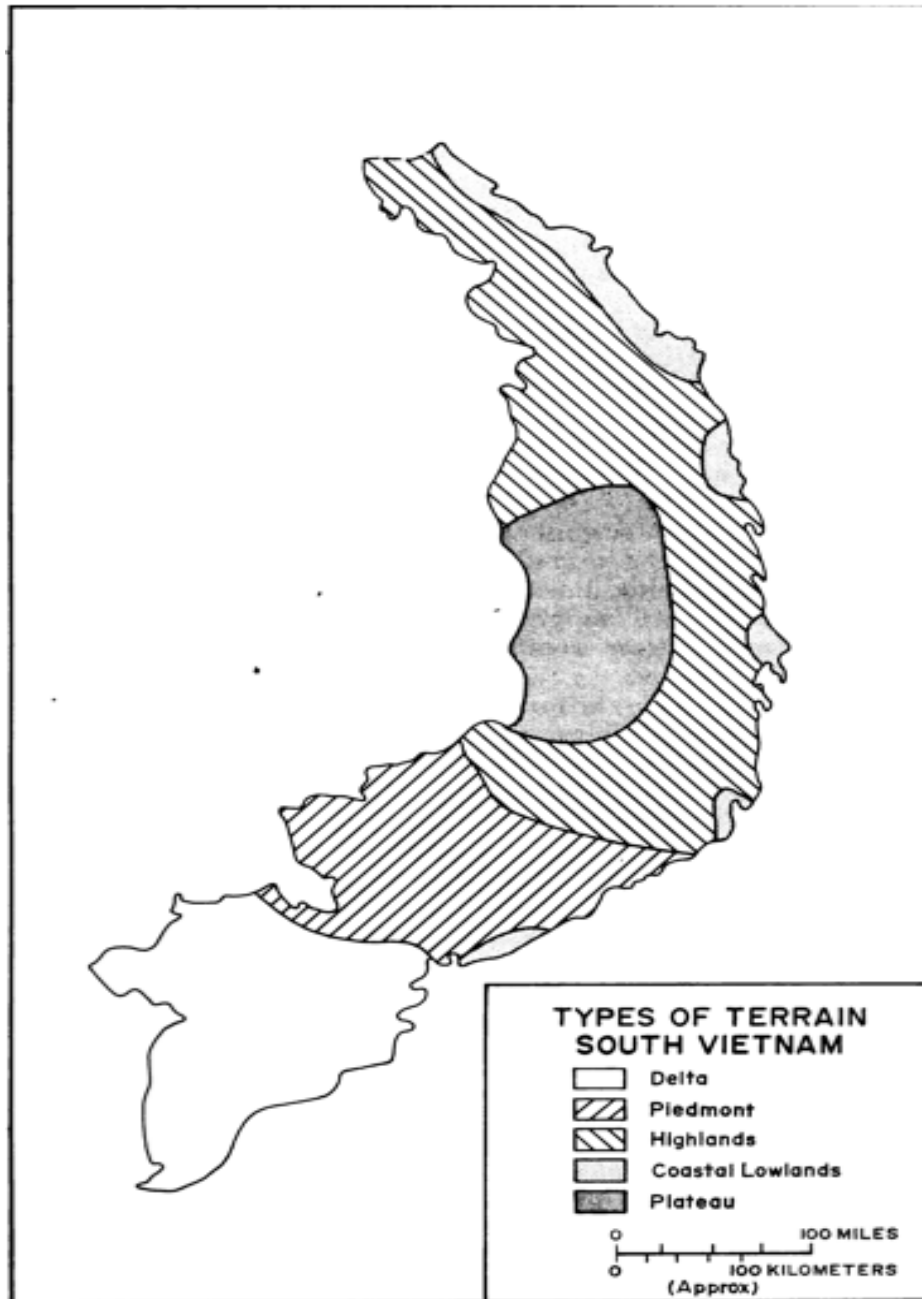
Figure 3. Types of Terrain in South Vietnam

Source: John H. Hay, *Vietnam Studies: Tactical and Material Innovations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1973), 8.

Chi Minh City (referred to throughout this study by its former name, Saigon) and provides

excellent opportunity for concealed north-south movement. Acting as a barrier for onshore winds

originating from the South China Sea, the Annamite Mountain Range creates the potential for contrasting weather conditions east and west of the mountain range. The North Vietnamese were able to exploit the terrain and weather in this region to move personnel and supplies into South Vietnam and stage forces. This vital line of communication was known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. During the U.S. military's transition to offensive operations, military action in Laos included covert Air Force and Navy air strikes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[86] To the north of Laos is Myanmar and China. To its south is Cambodia.

Cambodia shares borders with Thailand to its west, South Vietnam to its east and Laos to its north. Unlike Laos, Cambodia has direct access to the sea via the Gulf of Thailand, formerly the Gulf of Siam. Cambodia's border with South Vietnam predominately consists of lowland areas and plains. The Mekong River bisects Cambodia and serves as a line of communication between the Mekong Delta area and Cambodia.

The Annamite Mountain Range provides a natural border between North Vietnam and its neighbors, China and Laos. The periphery of North Vietnam consists of mountainous terrain. Moving towards the center of North Vietnam, the mountainous terrain transitions into the Red River Delta, which is generally flat and similar in character to the Mekong Delta area of South Vietnam. Offset from the Mekong River, the Red River flows into North Vietnam from southwest China into the Gulf of Tonkin. The majority of air strike targets within North Vietnam were in the Red River Delta.

For anyone charged with prosecuting a war in South Vietnam, the area of interest would have to include North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The success of MACV's mission within

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[86] The Air Force and Navy conducted covert air strikes into Laos as a part of OPERATION BARREL ROLL and OPERATION STEEL TIGER/TIGER HOUND. OPERATION BARREL ROLL focused on northeastern Laos while OPERATION STEEL TIGER/TIGER HOUND focused on southeastern Laos.
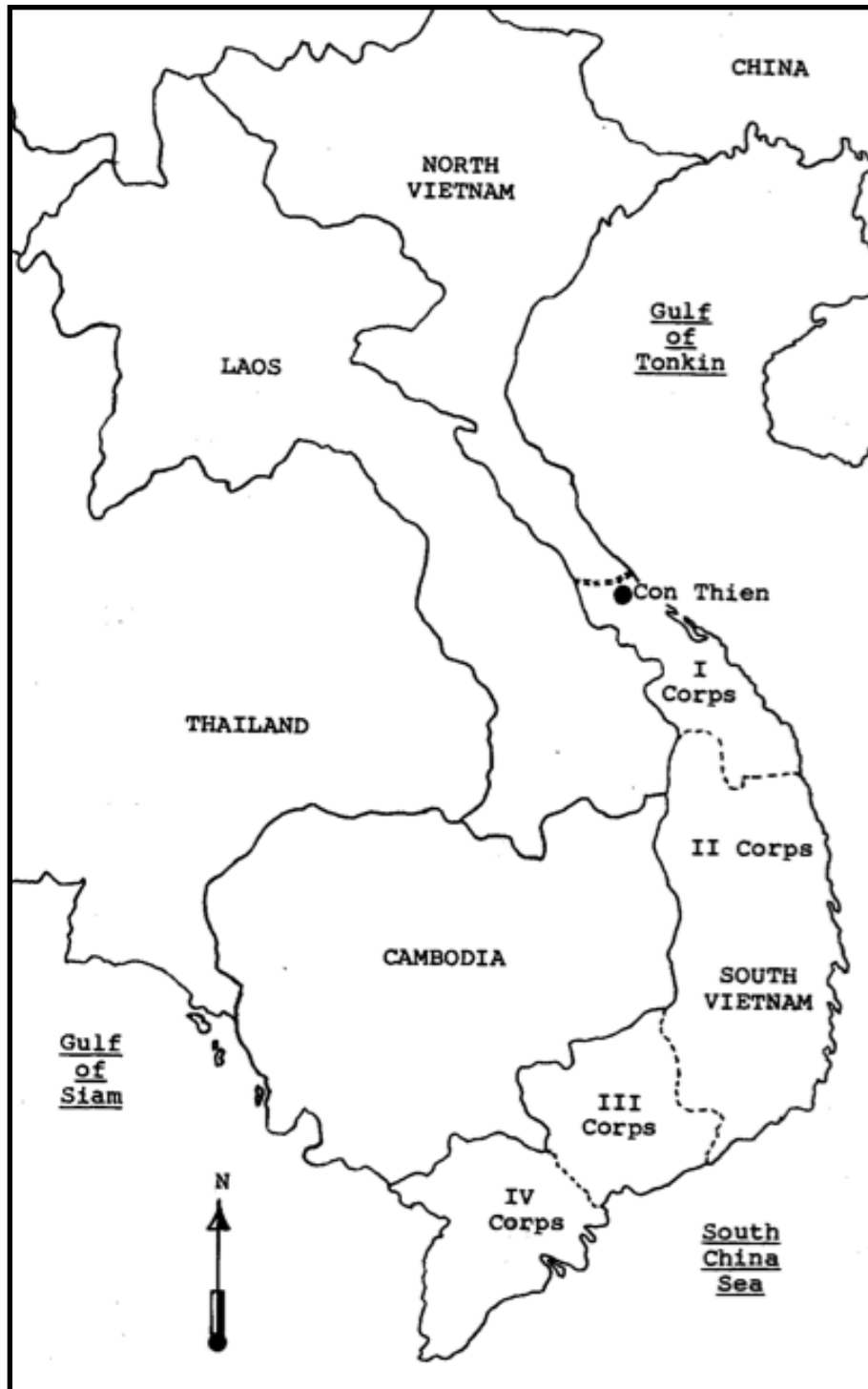
Figure 4. Map of Southeast Asia

Source: Southeast Asia and Vietnam Map, No Date, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, James Coan Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive /items.php?item=11370101004 (accessed 26 March 2013).

South Vietnam was contingent upon its capability to control shaping operations aimed at interdicting NVA and VC elements operating in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Limiting MACV's area of influence to within the borders of South Vietnam and only a small portion of North Vietnam north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), provided the North Vietnamese with an enhanced capability to exploit the terrain and weather to outflank U.S. and allied forces in South Vietnam. Two areas where the North Vietnamese leveraged knowledge of terrain and weather to gain an advantage over their adversaries were along the Mekong River and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Due to the existing command structure, the Mekong River and Ho Chi Minh Trail were largely outside the MACV's area of influence but were significant to mission success in South Vietnam.

<center>ESCALATION TO COMBAT OPERATIONS</center>

In March 1964, President Johnson authorized National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288, which emphasized the importance of an independent and non-communist South Vietnam.[87] The collapse of countries to communism within Southeast Asia threatened the security of surrounding countries to include India, Australia, Japan, and Korea.[88] In response to events unfolding between North Vietnamese patrol boats and U.S. Navy vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin, at 1443 hours on August 4, 1964 the JCS sent a telegram to Admiral Sharp initiating CINCPAC Operation Plan (OPLAN) 37-64.[89]

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[87] National Security Action Memorandum 288, Implementation of South Vietnam Programs, 17 March 1964, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/ johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam288.asp (accessed 17 December 2012).

[88] Pentagon Papers 3.IV.C., Summary of U.S. Programs and Policies in Vietnam War, November 1963 – April 1965, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Douglas Pike Collection, Box 3, Folder 2, http://vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item= 2130302003 (accessed 12 January 2013).

[89] Message from Joint Chiefs of Staff to Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, Alert

Hostilities in the Gulf of Tonkin provided President Johnson with sufficient congressional support to authorize the expansion of U.S. military efforts, including combat operations. As military efforts expanded, divergent ideas emerged on the conduct of warfare. Regarding the employment of air power, Admiral Sharp's perception of the *goldene mittelstrasse* differed significantly from General Westmoreland's. For Admiral Sharp, air power could achieve decisive victory.[90] As such, control of air assets resided at the PACOM level. For General Westmoreland, winning the ground war in South Vietnam was critical to success.[91] Accordingly, greater control of air assets should have resided with MACV.

CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 was the campaign plan for Southeast Asia. CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 called for the immediate deployment of military capability for the purpose of deterring enemy action and preparing for immediate offensive actions against North Vietnam should the need arise. In accordance with CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, the mission of U.S. forces was to "support or participate with RVN forces in the conduct of graduated operations to eliminate or reduce to negligible proportions DRV support of VC insurgency in the Republic of Vietnam."[92] Key tasks in Vietnam included limiting VC freedom of action along and through border areas

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and Deployment of Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command Operations Plan 37-64 Forces, 4 August 1964, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center Archive, Sedgewick Tourism Collection, Box 7, Folder 20, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item= 2860720058 (accessed 12 January 2013).

[90] Sharp, *A Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 2.

[91] Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Air Power in the Vietnam War*, 69-70; Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 30-31; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 131.

[92] Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military Planning in Support of National Security Action Memorandum 288 with Commander-in-Chief Operations Plan 37-64, Tab B enclosed, 25 June 1964, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Garnett Bell Collection, Box 23, Folder 7, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item= 11272307029 (accessed 12 January 2013).

with Laos and Cambodia, supporting South Vietnamese retaliatory actions against North Vietnam, increasing military pressure against North Vietnam, and posturing forces in Southeast Asia for extended operations should the situation escalate.[93]

According to CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, the U.S. national objective was to "develop an independent non-communist Republic of Vietnam which [could] maintain internal security and eliminate or control insurgent elements."[94] CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 depicted four military objectives that were critical to success in South Vietnam.[95] The first objective was to demonstrate to the people of Southeast Asia the resolve of the U.S. and its willingness to engage in military action to support South Vietnam's fight against communism. The second objective was to convince North Vietnam and China of the combined capability of the U.S. and South Vietnam to execute effective operations. In line with the policy of graduated pressure, the intent was to convince North Vietnam and China that the U.S. and South Vietnam could retaliate or escalate as a combined effort. The third objective was to stop North Vietnam's support to the VC. U.S., allied, and South Vietnamese forces would seek to eliminate VC sanctuaries, interdict enemy lines of communication, and disrupt the military, logistic, and economic infrastructure of North Vietnam. The final military objective of PACOM was to establish a strategic posture capable of executing offensive and defensive actions should North Vietnam or China commit to large-scale retaliation.

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[93] Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Military Planning in Support of National Security Action Memorandum 288 with Commander-in-Chief Operations Plan 37-64, Tab B enclosed, 25 June 1964.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

Escalation and MACV's New Mission

With the activation of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, MACV assumed missions to defend

against major NVA and VC offensives within South Vietnam and attack enemy forces.[96] To

accomplish this, MACV and Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) established a series

of defensive sectors. One ARVN corps-sized element and a reinforcing U.S. and allied Field

Force occupied one of four areas of operations. Each ARVN corps-sized element occupied a

Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). The only exception to this force array was within the Mekong Delta.

In this area, MACV did not reinforce the ARVN IV Corps with a corresponding U.S. and allied

Field Force.

According to COMUSMACV's interpretation of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, his new

mission was to "render advice and/or combat support to RVNAF."[97] MACV defined combat

support as "the support of one combat element in the accomplishment of its mission by another

combat element of the same or differing nationality."[98] MACV's objectives consisted of

defending key infrastructure, securing lines of communication, clearing designated pacification

zones, securing 60% of host nation civilians, and destroying NVA and VC bases by 40-50%.[99] By

the end of 1964, MACV's role included security of base areas, deep patrolling and offensive

operations, reaction operations in coordination with the RVNAF, and U.S. contingency

operations as required. With the exception of contingency operations aimed at reacting to overt

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[96] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 189.

[97] Message from Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam to Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, Concept for U.S./Allied Combat Operations in Support of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, 8 May 1965, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Larry Berman Collection, Box 1, Folder 27, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/ virtualarchive/items.php?item=0240127018 (accessed 17 November 2012).

[98] Ibid.

[99] Cosmas, 257-258.

Chinese aggression, COMUSMACV conceptualized these new tasks as following a "logical progression."[100]

On 17 September 1965, General Westmorland issued MACV Directive 525-4.[101] MACV Directive 525-4 identified a three-phased approach to defeating the VC and facilitating the Government of Vietnam's (GVN) control over South Vietnam. Phase I sought to halt the VC offensive or to "stem the tide."[102] Phase II aimed to resume the offensive by destroying the VC and pacifying selected high priority areas. Phase III sought to "restore progressively the entire country to the control of the GVN."[103]

<u>Divergent Views Regarding the Employment of Air Power</u>

It was unclear whether the purpose of air power was to facilitate decisive victory or to communicate with the North Vietnamese in accordance with the policy of graduated pressure. Once applied, General Westmoreland and other senior military leaders such as Admiral Sharp and General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, believed in the relentless bombing of North Vietnam within available means. Anything short of this would enable the North Vietnamese to adapt.[104] Others, particularly civilian leaders in the Johnson Administration, such as John McNaughton, Assistance Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, believed

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[100] Message from Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam to Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, Concept for U.S./Allied Combat Operations in Support of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces, 8 May 1965.

[101] Military Assistance Command Vietnam Directive 525-4, Tactics and Techniques for Employment of U.S. Forces in the Republic of Vietnam, 17 September 1965, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Larry Berman Collection, Box 3, Folder 3, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=0240303014 (accessed 17 November 2012).

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 134-135.

retaliatory air strikes were a medium for communication with the North Vietnamese. In a conversation between General Westmoreland, Assistant Secretary McNaughton, and Major General Joseph H. Moore, deputy commander for MACV and commander of the 2d Air Division, concerning plans to bomb Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites in North Vietnam, Assistant Secretary McNaughton espoused the belief that restraining from bombing SAM sites sent a signal to the North Vietnamese to not use them.[105] For some, the employment of air power as a medium for communication warranted its control at the highest levels. However, the idea of adjusting the intensity of air strikes for the purpose of communicating with the North Vietnamese perplexed many senior military leaders.

A difference of opinion regarding the purpose of air power also existed within the military ranks. General Westmoreland wholeheartedly supported the tasks associated with CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64, which included raids into North Vietnam, retaliatory air strikes, and cross-border operations in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh trail.[106] However, General Westmoreland favored delaying sustained air strikes against North Vietnam until South Vietnam achieved a greater capacity to defeat a communist counterattack. General Westmoreland agreed with reprisal air strikes but was concerned that a sustained air campaign would undermine the security of South Vietnam.[107] General Westmorland believed that a greater commitment of ground troops would have more of an immediate impact on the security of South Vietnam.[108] General Curtis LeMay, Air Force Chief of Staff, and General Wallace M. Greene, Commandant

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[105] Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 144-145.

[106] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967, United States Army in Vietnam*, 158.

[107] Westmoreland, 131. Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Air Power in the Vietnam War*, 69-70.

[108] Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 30-31.

of the Marine Corps, argued that the immediate bombing of North Vietnam would strengthen the security of South Vietnam.[109]

Dissonance regarding the control of air power also permeated senior military ranks. Escalation to combat operations prompted General Westmoreland to request authority over future retaliatory air strikes against North Vietnam and any subsequent air campaigns. Leveraging ongoing planning efforts between MACV and the RVNAF for covert to large-scale air strikes within Southeast Asia, General Westmoreland recommended to Admiral Sharp that MACV assume control of PACOM air assets. General Westmoreland's recommendation was to have Major General Joseph H. Moore, deputy commander for MACV and commander of the 2d Air Division, assume the role of allied combined air commander in South Vietnam.[110] In this role, he would exercise operational control of U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft. Under this arrangement, Major General Moore could direct U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft to strike MACV targets in North Vietnam and Laos. General Westmoreland believed he possessed the best vantage point for directing air strikes due to his geographic position, collaborative capability with the RVNAF, and understanding of the local political situation.[111] General Hunter Harris, CINCPACAF, disagreed with General Westmoreland's recommendation. General Harris wanted all air assets operating in Southeast Asia under the control of PACAF.[112] This arrangement facilitated the Air Force's single manager concept and also assuaged concerns regarding the lack of air expertise on the MACV staff. Retaliatory air strikes warranted rapid action by an experienced staff capable of generating correct mission instructions to executing units.

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[109] Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 16.

[110] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 166.

[111] Ibid., 174.

[112] Schlight, 32.

Furthermore, General Harris believed that General Westmoreland's recommendation divided PACAF too thinly if the Chinese intervened.[113] Divergent ideas regarding the control of air assets revealed a service culture difference regarding unity of command. The Air Force sought to control air assets under its single manager concept to vindicate air power. General Westmoreland, on the other hand, wanted to control air assets to support the ground fight in South Vietnam. Ultimately, Admiral Sharp decided to employ aircraft in Southeast Asia through his Air Force and Navy component commanders.[114]

SYNCHRONIZATION OF AIR ASSETS

Synchronizing the employment of air assets challenged CINCPAC as the U.S. transitioned from advisory to offensive operations. On 8 March 1965, approximately seven months after the incident between U.S. Navy vessels and North Vietnamese submarines in the Gulf of Tonkin, the first U.S. ground combat troops arrived in South Vietnam. 3d Battalion, 9th Marines, 3d Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force landed ashore on Red Beach in the port city of Da Nang. By the end of 1965, the following U.S. units were on the ground in South Vietnam: III MAF, which included the 3d Marine Division (Reinforced) and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing; 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile); 1st Infantry Division; 173d Airborne Brigade; 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division; Naval Advisory Group; Headquarters Support Activity; 1st Logistical Command; 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division; and elements of the 2d Air Division. In addition,

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[113] Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*, 73; Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 31-32.

[114] Cole, Poole, Schnabel, Watson, and Webb, *The History of the Unified Command Plan*, 36.

1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment arrived on 8 June 1965.[115] Lead elements of the Capitol Republic of Korea Division arrived in South Vietnam on 8 October 1965. The strength of the RVNAF also increased from 511,000 to 565,000.[116] In 1965, the U.S. ground troop commitment to South Vietnam increased U.S. from 23,000 to 181,000.[117] There was also a corresponding increase in the number of aircraft and naval vessels from the Air Force and Navy.

Increased U.S. commitment resulted in a proportionate increase in combat actions. 7 February 1965 marked the first major action against U.S. forces in South Vietnam as the VC attacked a U.S. compound in Pleiku, Central Highlands killing eight, wounding 108, and damaging or destroying 18 aircraft.[118] Later that day, in retaliation, the U.S. executed its first air strike in North Vietnam as U.S. Navy aircraft attacked the Dong Hoi military barracks north of the 17th parallel.[119] The following day, President Johnson ordered the evacuation of all U.S. dependents from South Vietnam. The U.S. executed this air strike and many to follow as a part of OPERATION FLAMING DART and OPERATION FLAMING DART II. By March 1965, OPERATION FLAMING DART morphed into OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER.

OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER consisted of overt air strikes into North Vietnam. OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER was an air campaign initiated against North Vietnam in 1965. Its purpose was to defeat Hanoi's will to fight and disrupt NVA and VC freedom of action

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[115] Military Assistance Command Vietnam Yearly Summary of Action for 1965, 1 January 1966, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Bud Harton Collection, Box 0, Folder 1, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=168300010716 (accessed 27 November 2012).

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

by destroying North Vietnamese industrial sites, destroying lines of communication, and interdicting infiltration routes into South Vietnam. According to Admiral Sharp, OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER air strikes would cause the government of North Vietnam to cease its support and direction of the insurgencies in South Vietnam and Laos.[120] OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER offered more flexibility should U.S. bombing efforts extend beyond retaliatory actions. Unlike OPERATION FLAMING DART, and later OPERATION FLAMING DART II, OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER went beyond "tit-for-tat" actions. This air campaign segmented North Vietnam into seven distinct zones or Route Packages.

On 1 April 1965, PACOM issued its basic operations order covering OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER. In order to de-conflict air operations, Admiral Sharp designated CINCPACAF as the air coordinating authority for OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER.[121] CINCPAC assigned responsibility for Route Packages within North Vietnam to three separate commands, essentially assigning operational areas according to service component. MACV assumed responsibility for Route Package I.[122] PACFLT assumed Route Packages II, III, IV, and

[120] Admiral Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 30 June 1968.

[121] Other ongoing missions in North Vietnam requiring deconfliction included OPERATION IRON HAND and OPERATION BLUE TREE. The purpose of OPERATION IRON HAND was to provide suppression of enemy air defense systems in North Vietnam to enable freedom of maneuver for OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER aircraft. OPERATION BLUE TREE consisted of a ongoing tactical reconnaissance missions in North Vietnam.

[122] Pacific Air Force had responsibility for Route Package I until April 1966. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, assumed responsibility for Route Package I with the justification that the area north of the I Corps Tactical Zone was an extension of its area of operations and therefore a part of the ground fight. In July 1966, General Westmoreland requested responsibility for Route Package II, but Admiral Sharp denied this request. Admiral Sharp believed Carrier Task Force 77 was covering the Route Package II with adequate strikes and that nothing could be gained by altering the assignment of route packages. Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967, United States Army in Vietnam*, 385; Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam*, 115-116; Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965 – 1968*, 202-203.
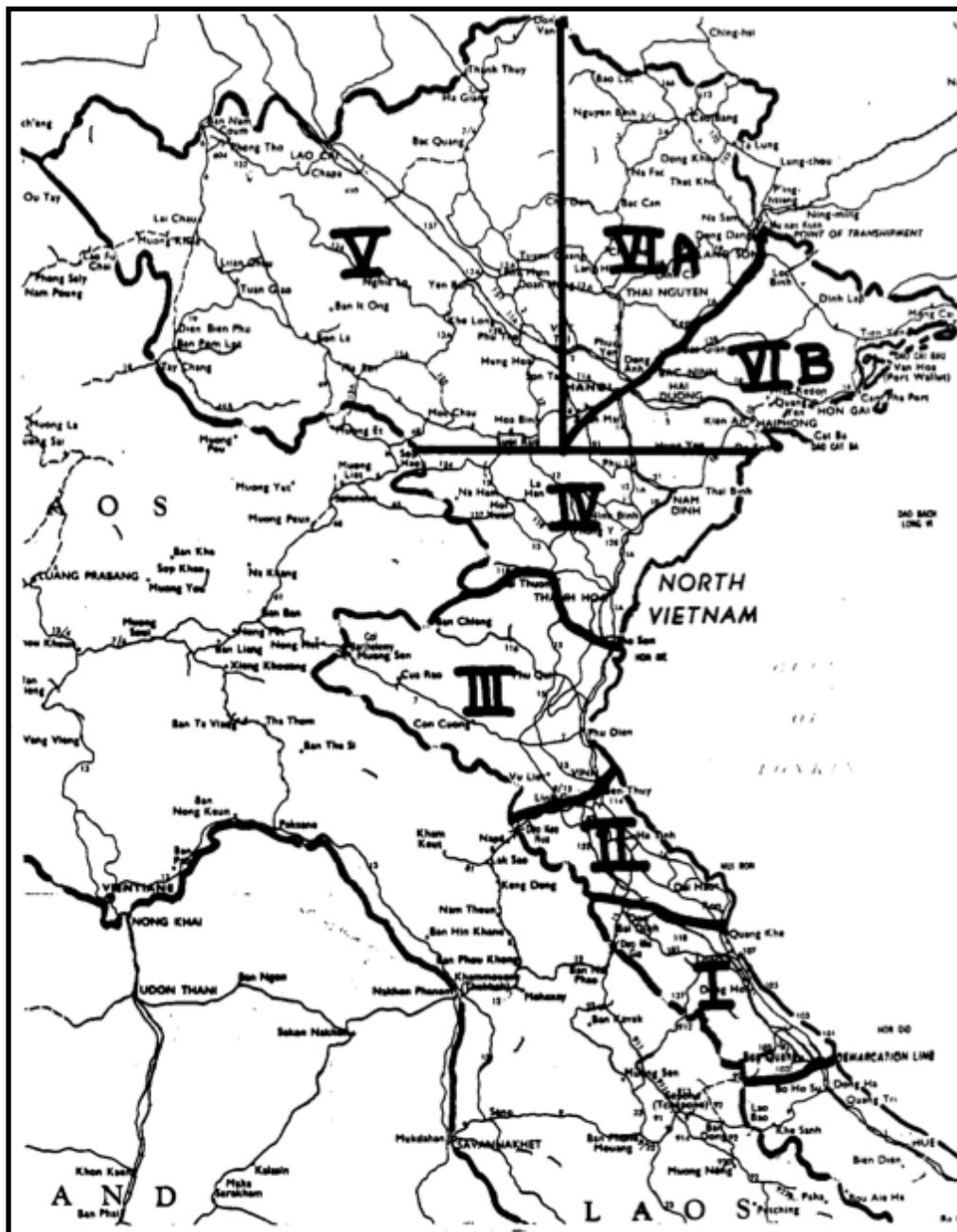
Figure 5. OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER Route Packages for North Vietnam

Source: Wesley R.C. Melyan and Lee Bonetti, Project CHECO Report #181 Rolling Thunder July 1965 – December 1966, Directorate, Tactical Evaluation, CHECO Division, Headquarters, Pacific Air Force, 15 July 1967, Texas Tech University, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Vietnam Archive Collection, Box 1, Folder 13, http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items. php?item= 0390113001 (accessed 10 March 2013).

VIB. Route Packages II, III, IV, and VIB were along the Gulf of Tonkin and were within range of carrier-launched aircraft. PACAF assumed Route Packages V and VIA.

COMUSMACV serviced targets within Route Package I using the 2d Air Division, later Seventh Air Force, and the Republic of Vietnam Air Force. Route Package I extended from the Gulf of Tonkin to the Laotian border and from the DMZ to the 18th parallel.[123] Targets in this area included major lines of communication leading from North Vietnam to Laos and South Vietnam.

Route Package II consisted of major hubs for shipping. Route Package III was the Navy's largest area but had relatively fewer targets compared other Route Packages. Targets in this area included coastal rail and road networks. Route Package IV was a highly active area. In addition to a vast logistics network, this area contained an all-weather airfield that the North Vietnamese Air Force used for staging attacks into South Vietnam. The Navy also assumed responsibility of Route Package VIB.

Route Package VI was the most active and most important Route Package for OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER. This area housed Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam, and its associated infrastructure within the Red River Delta area. A majority of targets for OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER were located in this area. CINCPAC divided Route Package VI into two areas. The Air Force assumed Route Package VIA and the Navy assumed Route Package VIB.[124] In addition to Route Package VIA, the Air Force was responsible for Route Package V. Twice the size of any other area, Route Package V targets consisted of lines of communication for sustaining North Vietnamese forces in Laos.

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[123] The 1954 Geneva Accords established a Demilitarized Zone on the border between South and North Vietnam. The Demilitarized Zone ran along the 17th parallel.

[124] The dividing line between Route Package VIA and VIB was a railroad.

According to General Momyer, "[t]he route package system was a compromise approach to a tough command and control decision, an approach which, however understandable, inevitably prevented a unified, concentrated air effort."[125] He further argued that "[d]ividing North Vietnam into route packages compartmentalized our Airpower and reduced its capabilities… [o]ne result was that 7th Air Force diverted too many sorties into Route Package I when weather prevented strikes in Route Package V or VI… [o]n the other hand, TF-77 had an inadequate number of aircraft for 24-hour coverage of its assigned route packages."[126]

The Route Package construct mitigated the limited range of carrier launched naval air assets.[127] It also provided localized control over assigned areas. However, a disjointed command structure between MACV, PACAF, and PACFLT coupled with the geographic separation of service component operational areas degraded the efficient use of all available air assets. For example, during the winter monsoon season, low ceilings and changing weather patterns warranted the need to quickly retask aircraft to alternate targets if weather conditions prevented pilots from attacking their primary targets. Seventh Air Force and Seventh Fleet did not have the capability to dynamically retask aircraft to alternate targets. The authority required to strike targets in North Vietnam resided beyond operational and tactical level commanders. In addition, the Route Package construct compartmentalized Air Force and Navy aircraft to designated areas. Air Force assets did not strike Navy targets and vice versa. This resulted in an inefficient use of available air assets. It was not uncommon for aircrews to cancel missions for bad weather knowing that they could have conducted other missions in areas where the weather was more

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[125] Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam*, 108.

[126] Ibid., 106.

[127] Deck cycle speeds on aircraft carriers also limited the generation of naval aircraft sorties.

favorable. This was not due to a lack of aircrew bravery or motivation, but rather the limited authority of operational and tactical level commanders and the Route Package construct itself.

An unclear delineation of responsibility between CINCPAC and COMUSMACV affected synchronization efforts between all service components. During 1965, the U.S. Air Force and the Vietnamese Air Force launched approximately 60,000 sorties into South Vietnam and approximately 12,000 sorties into North Vietnam.[128] In the same year, Navy and Marine carrier and land-based aviation assets launched approximately 39,000 sorties into South Vietnam and approximately 6,600 sorties into North Vietnam.[129] Polarized views regarding the employment of air power resulted in the piecemeal employment of air assets. The absence of clear command and support relationships between MACV, PACAF, and PACFLT exacerbated the piecemeal employment of air power within Southeast Asia.[130] As the civilian leadership, Army, Air Force, and Navy debated over whether the successful prosecution of the war hinged on the efforts to support ground forces in South Vietnam or air strikes in North Vietnam, the employment of military capability ultimately followed parochial interests. Accordingly, each service fixated on mutually exclusive geographic areas independent of an overarching purpose. MACV focused on its operations in South Vietnam to attrit NVA and VC forces while PACAF and PACFLT concentrated their efforts on OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER bombing missions in North Vietnam to quickly end the war and validate classic air power theory.[131]

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[128] Military Assistance Command Vietnam Yearly Summary of Action for 1965, 1 January 1966.

[129] Ibid.

[130] Cosmas, *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation 1962-1967*, 320-323; Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*, 64-79.

[131] Horwood, *Interservice Rivalry and Airpower in the Vietnam War*, 72.

According to Admiral Sharp, the command structure for air strikes "provided an effective means of exercising coordination of air operations in North Vietnam without a combined command structure."[132] From Admiral Sharp's vantage point this arrangement "satisfied diverse operational requirements and performed to [his] expectations."[133] However, commanders operating within Southeast Asia provided a different view of the U.S. military's ability to synchronize the use of air power. This alternate view stemmed from the question of who actually had the authority to approve air strikes into North Vietnam.

The authority level required to approve targets in North Vietnam far surpassed CINCPAC's authority. Essentially, unity of command resided at the presidential level. Target nominations flowed from subordinate headquarters through PACOM, the JCS, and the Secretary of Defense, then to the President for approval.[134] Rather than orchestrating OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER, PACOM served as a relay for decisions occurring within Washington. Although the purpose of this arrangement was to facilitate Washington's graduated pressure policy, it undoubtedly led to discord among tactical units. For Major General Joseph H. Moore, this arrangement resulted in confusion because it did not appear as if Admiral Sharp had authority over OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER missions. According to Major General Moore, "this [command structure] was tremendously frustrating."[135] Tight management of air strikes into North Vietnam also degraded tactical commander initiative. Major General Moore stated "that

[132] Admiral Sharp, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command, *Report on the War in Vietnam*, 30 June 1968.

[133] Sharp, *Strategy for Defeat: Vietnam in Retrospect*, 66.

[134] Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam*, 88.

[135] Lieutenant General Joseph H. Moore, U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 22 November 1969, Project Corona Harvest Collection, Department of the Air Force, K239.0512-241.
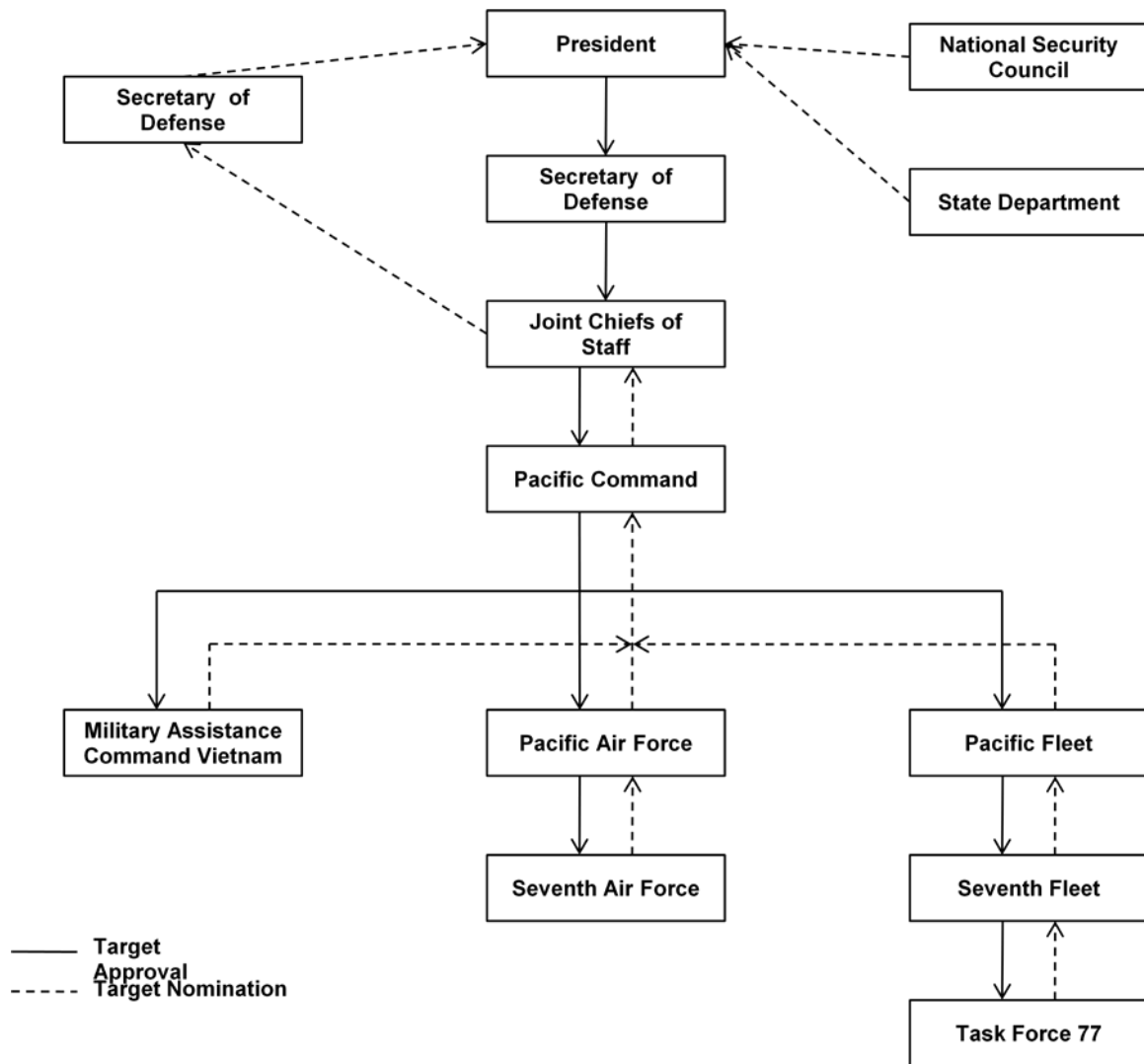
Figure 6. Target Request and Approval for North Vietnam

Source: Adapted from General William W. Momyer's depiction of the target request and approval process for conducting air strikes into North Vietnam. William W. Momyer, *Air Power in Three Wars: WWII, Korea, Vietnam* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 2003), 88.

[he] was never allowed in the early days to send a single airplane [to] North Vietnam that [he] wasn't told how many bombs it would have, how many airplanes were in the flight, and what time it would be over the target…[a]nd if we couldn't get there at that time for some reason (weather or whatnot), we couldn't put the strike on later… [w]e had to just cancel it and start

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over."[136] Major General Moore's statement exposes the link between command structure and the capability to synchronize military actions in time, space, and purpose. In the case of the OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER, the authority to approve air strikes resided at levels beyond the reach of operational and tactical level commanders. This resulted in the inefficient use of available air assets, the piecemeal application of combat power, and the loss of subordinate leader initiative.

CONCLUSION

The initiation of CINCPAC OPLAN 37-64 and the U.S. military's subsequent shift from advisory operations to offensive operations signified the waning utility of diplomacy to protect U.S. interests in Southeast Asia. For decades following the end of the Vietnam War, the actions of the U.S. military have solicited scrutiny. According to some revisionist historians of the Vietnam War, misdirected military actions during the early years of the war prevented the attainment of national strategic objectives. This disconnect between tactical actions and strategic objectives inevitably resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 1973. Some military professionals attribute failure in South Vietnam to the U.S. military's ineffective employment of operational art as we understand it today. This is especially true for those who espouse that it is the military's charter to link tactical actions with strategic objectives.

Despite an already complex situation brought about through hybrid warfare, policy-makers and senior commanders compounded their problems by selecting inadequate command arrangements. Whether this was due to reasons associated with retaining flexibility in the case of large-scale Chinese intervention, the Vietnam War command structure impeded the synchronization of air assets. The fragmented nature of the Route Package construct for

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[136] Lieutenant General Joseph H. Moore, U.S. Air Force Oral History Interview, 22 November 1969.

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OPERATION ROLLING THUNDER compartmentalized Air Force and Navy aircraft to designated areas. Rightfully so, each service focused on their own designated areas in accordance with their own agendas. The result was a piecemeal application of tactical military actions remiss of operational coherence.

The implication here is not to suggest that changes to command arrangements within PACOM would have altered the course of the Vietnam War. In this case, it is difficult to suggest that the operational level command structure was a causal mechanism for failure in Vietnam. One could easily argue that a healthy debate existed between senior level commanders from all service components regarding the command structure for the war. Examining command arrangements and their impacts upon tactical actions offers two takeaways. First, getting the command structure right is critical to a military organization's ability to synchronize. This is especially true at the operational level of war. Without a clear command structure, the success of military operations hinges on mutual support between what would otherwise be disparate organizations. Second, unity of command implies that someone is in charge, which is not always the case. When someone is not in charge, an organization's ability to integrate with adjacent organizations creates a better chance for overall success. The capability to adjust internal interests and engage in teamwork to achieve mutually beneficial results characterizes a successful organization in modern warfare. As was the case during the Vietnam War, the ability to create unity of command through the development of a clear command structure is not always possible. This is especially true at the operational level of war where policy intermingles with military strategy. At this level, senior civilian and military leaders espouse potentially diverging views regarding the conduct of warfare. Today, as military professionals engage in a whole of government approach, accounting for disparate organizations is critical to mission success. As such, military professionals should constantly attempt to discover ways for disparate organizations to complement one another.

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